

Marion Willms

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Rodney, Ontario

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Greetings

Richard Leatham, Taraesa Tellier, Ryan Stratham, Bill Denning and township staff

I am writing to request a review the property standard bylaws concerning noxious weeds.

I am concerned that the current bylaws to do not support biodiversity.

I am willing to be part of this discussion. As you know, I am an active member of the Rodney horticultural society. Enclosed is information about how to transform traditional turf grass lawns to vibrant ecosystems.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With thanks

[REDACTED]

Marion Willms

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AN OPEN LETTER TO CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES,

Imagine a future where community well-being and the environment thrive together, supported by forward-thinking municipal policies

Across Canada, people are learning about the many benefits of habitat gardens, spaces where traditional turfgrass lawns have been transformed into vibrant ecosystems. These gardens are carefully cultivated with plants that attract and support a diversity of wildlife including birds, bees, and butterflies. Habitat gardens demonstrate a proactive, local response to the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. However, municipal property standards, practices, and bylaws can limit the potential of these personal and community initiatives.

In response, the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA), the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF), the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF), the Ecological Design Lab located at Toronto Metropolitan University, and renowned author and environmental advocate Lorraine Johnson have joined forces. Together, we are advocating for the reform of municipal bylaws to better support the development of habitat gardens that enrich our communities, improve quality of life, and contribute to ecological stewardship.

We acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of municipalities to-date and offer our encouragement and support to further advance essential bylaw reform and enforcement policies and procedures. Through this open letter we aim to bolster the efforts of residents and organizations advocating for municipal bylaw reform and to encourage municipalities to be leaders in ecological stewardship. To make a real difference, we must act decisively and collaboratively. Municipalities must lead by example, support their local champions, and take steps to inform the wider community. Through this approach, municipalities can create a powerful momentum for transforming our landscape practices and policies.

WE CALL ON CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES TO:

- 1. Reform municipal bylaws:** Revise existing property standard bylaws that discourage or prohibit habitat gardens, ensuring that new versions support biodiversity and ecological health.
- 2. Initiate bylaw enforcement training:** Bylaw enforcement policies and procedures must include training for bylaw enforcement officers on native and prohibited plant identification, essential and permitted habitat features, community relations, and the legal rights of gardeners to express their environmental ethics.
- 3. Lead by example:** Insist on a high level of ecological gardening awareness and practice among city employees tending to public gardens, green infrastructure, natural areas and other lands.
- 4. Commit to community outreach and education:** Effective outreach programs are crucial for shifting public perceptions and fostering a deeper understanding of sustainable practices. Municipalities should partner with community leaders and committed organizations to deliver habitat garden resources and events, and install and maintain habitat gardens on public land.

What are habitat gardens?

Habitat gardens, also known as pollinator gardens, native plant gardens or naturalized landscapes, are spaces where traditional turfgrass lawns have been transformed into vibrant ecosystems. These gardens are carefully cultivated with plants that attract and support a diverse range of wildlife, including birds, bees, butterflies, and other beneficial organisms.

Habitat gardens can fit in with a variety of gardening styles. They are versatile, fitting various sizes and shapes, and can be developed in both private and public spaces, including residential yards, community parks, school yards, hedgerows and public rights-of-way. However, they are often designed to look like nature and can appear different from conventional gardens. Some people may think they look “messy” because habitat gardens are continually changing as vegetation grows, dies, decomposes and regenerates over time.

BENEFITS OF HABITAT GARDENS

- 1. Increase Biodiversity:** Habitat gardens support a variety of pollinators, birds, and other wildlife, and increase biological diversity.
- 2. Improve Air and Water Quality:** Habitat gardens play a critical role in filtering pollutants from the air and water.
- 3. Reduce Erosion and Improve Soil Quality:** Native meadow and prairie plants have deep root systems that enhance soil structure, increase water infiltration, and reduce runoff, preventing soil erosion and water pollution.
- 4. Enhance Urban Resilience:** Habitat gardens provide natural cooling for cities, thereby reducing the unhealthy urban heat island effect.
- 5. Manage Stormwater:** Habitat gardens can reduce local flooding by storing and slowing down stormwater, reducing the burden on stormwater infrastructure during extreme events.
- 6. Reduce Water Use:** Native plants matched to landscape conditions are resilient and often require less irrigation during times of drought.
- 7. Sequester Carbon:** By increasing plant biomass (both above and below the ground), habitat gardens store more carbon and contribute to climate change mitigation, through a process called carbon sequestration.
- 8. Enhance Health and Well-being:** Habitat gardens connect us with nature, offering benefits that reduce stress and increase mental health and well-being, improving the quality of life.
- 9. Reduce maintenance costs:** By reducing the need for extensive lawn care, such as reduced mowing, watering, chemical treatments, and yard waste collection, habitat gardens can offer cost savings for property owners, especially municipalities tasked with maintaining large areas of public land.

aesthetically-based terms common in bylaws, such as “excessive growth”, as they are vague and therefore unenforceable. The legal perspectives on this issue are crucial as they underscore the need for municipal bylaws that conform to Court rulings and promote public environmental interests.

Therefore, it is imperative for municipalities to review and revise their bylaws to:

- 1. Adopt landscape maintenance standards that support, rather than prevent, biodiversity efforts.**
- 2. Promote the cultivation of native species and biodiverse landscapes such as pollinator gardens.**
- 3. Support the broader environmental and community goals that are increasingly vital in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss.**

FEATURES OF BIODIVERSITY-SUPPORTING BYLAWS:

- List prohibited plants rather than using vague and subjective terms such as “weeds.”
- Engage with Indigenous communities and Rights holders to develop the list of prohibited plants.
- Specify that height restrictions apply to mowed lawns (turfgrass), not non-turfgrass plants that do not obstruct sightlines.
- Focus on health and safety rather than aesthetics, and avoid the use of subjective, aesthetically-based terms such as “excessive growth” and “tidy.”
- Offer clear support for the protection of habitat elements including fallen leaves and logs, and old plant stalks.

Helpful resources for municipalities and advocacy groups are available for download under [Bylaws for Biodiversity](#), including a [research report](#) on municipal codes and a [Toolkit for Local Governments](#) developed by the Ecological Design Lab at the Toronto Metropolitan University.

Additional Actions for Municipalities

For municipalities that have already taken the first steps towards supporting habitat gardens and enhancing biodiversity through updated policies and bylaws, there are additional actions you can take to continue to advocate for change. Here are some examples:

Demonstration Gardens: Make space for, support, and lead the creation of habitat gardens on public lands to serve as highly-visible examples of the ecological and societal benefits of sustainable landscape management.



THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

The Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA) is the professional, non-profit organization committed to promoting the art, science, and practice of landscape architecture in Canada. This year, while celebrating its 90th anniversary, the society represents over 3,200 members, including landscape architects, associates/interns, and students.

The CSLA is dedicated to elevating public awareness of landscape architecture and advocating on behalf of national issues pertinent to the profession including urban design and renewal, parks and green space planning, the development of sustainable and equitable communities, and adapting to climate change. The landscape architecture profession embraces designing with nature by employing innovative solutions to tackle intricate design challenges. This blend ensures a balanced consideration of societal needs with the preservation of the natural environment. Learn more about the CSLA [here](http://csla-aapc.ca).

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Founded in 1990, the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) is a national, bilingual non-profit organization headquartered in Vancouver, with offices in Toronto and Montreal. We are guided by the fundamental truth that we are interconnected with nature, and with each other. What we do to the planet and its living creatures, we do to ourselves.

Through research, education, policy analysis and community engagement, we work to protect and restore the natural environment, and help create a sustainable Canada. We regularly collaborate with non-profit and community organizations, all levels of government, businesses and individuals. Learn more about DSF [here](http://Davidsuzuki.org).

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